

# **Between “Ethnocide” and “Genocide”: Violence and Otherness in the Coverage of the Afghanistan and Chechnya Wars**

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## **Abstract**

The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the two Russian wars in Chechnya were the longest, most protracted conflicts of the USSR and Russia after WWII. Both were conducted under conditions of unprecedented violence in peripheral territories. Despite their distance in time and space, both wars are closely linked to each other on the level of cultural representations in contemporary Russia. This paper analyses how the conflicts were represented in a key Soviet and Russian newspaper as the wars unfolded. It analyses the textual and visual coverage of the wars in the *Krasnaia zvezda* (1980-1986; 2000-2003), in order to disclose changing interpretations of violence and the Other. The paper argues, firstly, that *Krasnaia zvezda* told the story of two different types of violence prevailing in each conflict. The Afghan case was presented as one that put the social and cultural transformation of the population at the center of its attention – violence was hence not only physical and excessive but also cultural, as it aimed at the social fabric of society. The Chechen case focused on the recapture of territory and the restoration of sovereignty. Therefore, physical violence appeared more bluntly in the coverage of the conflict. Secondly, the paper shows that these two different types of violence implied two different visions of the Other. In Afghanistan, the Other was represented as becoming more and more similar to the socialist Self. This dynamic is visually underscored by numerous images of Afghans who have embarked on the path to Soviet modernity. In Chechnya, in contrast, the Other was presented as traditional, backward, and immutable. The Other was usually reduced to complete cultural difference and depicted a dehumanized fashion. This orientalizing of the Other was a precondition for the use of excessive physical violence.

**Key words:** Afghanistan, Chechnya, Self, Other, Photography, Violence

## Introduction

The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the two Russian wars in Chechnya were the most protracted conflicts of the USSR and of Russia after WWII. During the occupation of Afghanistan, between 1979 and 1989, Moscow sent 620,000 troops into the country to support a revolutionary regime and its efforts to transform society. According to official figures, 13,833 soldiers never made it back home. However, other sources suggest that about 75,000 died in combat, and that roughly 1.3 million civilians were killed (Feifer 2009, 254-255).<sup>1</sup> Figures for the wars in Chechnya, roughly between 1994 and 2008, are even more unreliable. Official accounts of this conflict, which was widely fought by federal troops to keep separatist Chechnya within Russia, put the number of soldiers killed at 3,613 between 1999 and 2007 (Oushakine 2009, 152). Independent experts estimate that the total death toll could be up to 160,000 people (RFE/RL 2014).<sup>2</sup>

Both wars were peripheral conflicts, and were waged in societies considered to be deeply different in terms of culture, religion, and lifestyle (Seniavskaia 2006, 231). They are closely linked on the cultural level, with their contemporary representations in various media drawing on each other. The conflict in Chechnya is understood on the cultural level through the lens of the experiences made in Afghanistan.<sup>3</sup> This cross-reference also applies to the veterans of the Chechen war, who use the comparison with the Soviet war in Afghanistan as a basic narrative for structuring their own memories, seeing themselves as “younger brothers” of the *Afgantsy*, the veterans of the Afghanistan war (Zvereva 2002; Oushakine 2009, 157-171; Varennikov 2004).

The aim of this paper is to proceed from this contemporary cultural interconnectedness between the representations of these conflicts, and to highlight commonalities and differences in their visual and textual coverage while the conflicts took place. To achieve this aim, I will draw on photographs and reports published in the official newspaper of the Ministry of Defense, *Krasnaia zvezda* [*Red Star*]. This “special interest” newspaper reflects official positions and was published without interruption during the whole period under scrutiny. Focusing on military affairs, it covered both conflicts regularly and prominently.

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1 Feifer (2009) provides a concise introduction into the War in Afghanistan. For more detailed accounts see Braithwaite (2013) and Kalinovsky (2011). They all draw on Liakhovskii (1995). For an account covering the Soviet and Russian involvement in Afghanistan see Gareev (1996).

2 About the consequences of the Chechen wars cf. Le Huérou (2014).

3 Galina Zvereva underscored that the “direct comparison of the experience in Chechnya with that of the USSR in Afghanistan has a crucial importance for the makers of mass [cultural] products. It is ‘doomed to succeed’ to the extent that it fully coincides with (...) collective imaginations and formulas of ‘narrative knowledge’” Zvereva (2002, 102-109).

While I will repeatedly allude to the historical and political contexts of the reports and photographs under scrutiny, my paper will widely abstain from “historicizing the spectator,” as demanded by John Tagg (1982, 113). Rather, my more modest aim is to analyze two selected areas of representation and compare how their visualization changed over a timespan of thirty years. Firstly, I will compare the ways *Krasnaia zvezda* depicted the encounter between Self and Other. Secondly, I will deduce from the imagery basic Soviet and Russian ideas about the types of violence that were exercised in Afghanistan and Chechnya, respectively.

While I am aware that this imagery will tell few things about the actual events on the ground, it can say a lot about the story the Ministry of Defense wanted to tell its Soviet and Russian audience about these wars at the edges of their countries, as well as about the official views on violence and otherness. Put differently, this coverage is a proxy for the Soviet Union’s and post-Soviet Russia’s self-projection and *mise-en-scène*, as well as for their relation to their respective peripheries. Thus, I am not concerned with the actual history of these conflicts, with the violence that took place, but rather interested in the changing sense and meaning *Krasnaia zvezda* tried to confer to violence and otherness. To achieve this aim, I will make particular use of ideas developed by French political anthropologist Pierre Clastres.

### **Violence and the State**

*Archeology of Violence*, first published in 1980 by Clastres, refers to the role of war and violence, mainly in primitive societies.<sup>4</sup> However, it also provides valuable insights on the discourse on violence within social sciences, and ultimately, how “modern man” conceives violence whenever encountering or applying it in the “wilderness” of distant places.

Clastres distinguished three approaches to violence. Firstly, the naturalist approach, according to which violence belongs to the human as species. Almost as a “zoological property of the human species, violence is identified here as a (...) natural given rooted in the biological being of man” (Clastres 2010, 243). Clastres quickly dismisses this view, pointing out that the biologization of violence disregards its deeply social dimension.

The second conception is the economist approach. It departs from the conviction that primitive societies are always societies of poverty, and that this lack inevitably leads to

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4 Clastres “advances a functionally positive relation between ‘war’ (...) and the collective intentionality that defines what constitutes primitive societies” (Viveiros de Castro 2010, 10).

violent competition (Clastres 2010, 247).<sup>5</sup> Lashing out against this economist and Marxist arguments, Clastres argues that in primitive societies all needs were carefully gauged and met. Surplus production was possible but useless (Clastres 2010, 250, 259).

Finally, the exchangist argument, following Lévi-Strauss, points at the continuity between exchange and war. If exchange fails, violence will ensue (Clastres 2010, 253). Clastres is clearly bothered by assigning to violence the status of a corollary, stripping it of any independent value. He aims at acknowledging the *autonomy of violence* as well as its *political character*. Clastres stresses that violence in primitive societies rests on their wish to maintain independence and distinctiveness – hence, “war is a structure of primitive society,” because the society refuses by all means division (Clastres 2010, 264). In this sense, for Clastres, the State means the end of the primitive society because it is the end of society as an undivided We, making primitive society a *Society Against the State*. Concurring with Hobbes, Clastres argues that “war prevents the State, [and that] the State prevents war” (Clastres 2010, 277), however disagreeing with him that a warring, and thus stateless society is no society at all.

We will see to which extent these conceptions of violence, war and the state can also be traced in the Soviet and Russian representations of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Chechnya. What they all share is a conception of violence as something visible and physical.<sup>6</sup>

### Encountering the Other

Being deeply suspicious of the modern state, Pierre Clastres also contributed to systematize the contact between industrial and less developed societies. For him, in these encounters, the latter always tended either toward to the cultural removal of the latter’s difference (“ethnocide”) or to its physical elimination (“genocide”). Ethnocide and genocide both have the same starting point: a notion of the Other as representing a negative difference. However, ethnocide and genocide handle this Otherness differently: genocide proceeds to physically remove difference, while ethnocide rests on the assumption that the Other can be reformed and improved. While “genocide” is physical, “ethnocide” is the destruction of “ways of living and thinking” (Clastres 1974, 102).<sup>7</sup> It is crucial to see that both activities come with an excess

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5 This position also echoes strongly the European 19th century discourses that equate pauperism with a social danger and evoke the fear of the mob (Procacci 1991, 158).

6 Here, Clastres fails to grasp the structural dimension of violence to which Johan Galtung (1969) has referred and whose insights remain valid today (Dilts 2012, 192).

7 This notion of improvement of the Other permeates much of Western thought since the times of colonialism, as has been argued by Tania M. Li (2007). As for the Soviet Union, it “was founded on ideas and plans for

of violence, albeit assuming different forms. The former is intentional, bodily, visible, (Popitz 1992, 48), the latter is no less intentional, however, it concerns body and mind, and can remain invisible. Ethnocidal violence belongs to the essence of the state, Clastres argues (1974, 107),<sup>8</sup> because the state negates difference. Clastres also raises the question to which extent ethnocide (and genocide) require the existence of a modern state bureaucracy in order to take place.<sup>9</sup>

The Soviet attitude to its periphery tended to the “ethnocide.” As a matter of fact, within the USSR, the aim was to forge a *sovietskii narod* (Edgar 2006, 582). This attempt at forging a common identity was preceded by an intellectual and organizational effort to scientifically define difference and establish otherness, starting in the 1920s (Hirsch 2005, 101-230). Only then, after determining and fixing national identity, all these identities were foreseen to melt into one overarching Soviet people. Thus, the Other is considered to be different but on an evolutionary path to become equal, something similar to what the Russian imperial elite called “spiritual fusion” (*sliianie*) in the 1870s (Tolz 2001, 36). The idea of the “new historical community - *sovietskii narod*” implies a grand strategy of inclusion (Mirsky 2001, 293), which, however, could also turn violent. We will see how this inclusive understanding of the Other is reflected in the Afghan case but is totally absent in the Chechen one. In the former instance, we can expect the reappearance of the patterns adopted within the Soviet Union itself, especially in Central Asia; in the latter case, the Chechens are represented as having failed to comply with the cultural and political model proposed. They remained utterly different and hence excluded.

A key concept looming behind this discussion is *Orientalism*.<sup>10</sup> Both concerning Afghanistan and Chechnya, orientalist patterns of interpretation surface time and again. This is even more so, because there is an intimate link between Orientalism and war: Waging war on the Other requires its orientalization (Barkawi and Stanski 2012, 2-3). However, a key feature of Orientalism which will repeatedly come up is that it can also entail “a tutelary

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the betterment of humanity, rather than on concepts of identity and nation,” and it inherited the belief to be endowed “with a special destiny to clear the Asian wilderness and civilize the tribes of the East” (Westad 2007, 37-40).

8 “Toute organisation étatique est ethnocidaire, l'ethnocide est le mode normal d'existence de l'état” (Clastres 1974, 107).

9 Interestingly then, the modern state, for Clastres, prevents war, as seen above. On the other hand, it does not prevent ethnocide - quite the contrary. While tying ethnocide closely to the state, Clastres anticipates the critique against Kaldor (1999); he also echoes Foucault's argument on state racism (Foucault 1978) but is at odds with Arendt's insistence on the “inherent genocidal potential of the modern state” (Bartov 2000, 130).

10 Orientalism is “the corporate institution for dealing with the Orient,” a style for “having authority over the Orient” and “a style of thought” (Said, 2003, 2-3). For a discussion of Russian Orientalism cf. Khalid (2000).

relationship with the Other, when the Other is not equal, but can come of age and become the Self,” with a “dimension of irreducible difference and antagonism” being absent (Barkawi and Stanski 2012, 24); this holds for Afghanistan but not for Chechnya, as will be shown below.

### **Photography and the visibility of violence**

My aim in this brief section is to introduce a discursive understanding of photography, and to stress that pictures depend on texts to be interpreted. I also would like to highlight the role photography played as a means to produce and reproduce very clear-cut representations of the Self and the Other, as well as its connection to violence.

In contrast to Roland Barthes (1977, 33-34), Allan Sekula claims that the “photograph, as it stands alone, presents merely the possibility of meaning. (...) it is impossible even to conceive of an actual photograph in a ‘free state’, unattached to a system of validation and support, that is, to a discourse” (Sekula 1982, 91). Hence, I will make extensive use of the texts which surround each picture directly and indirectly, seeing text and photograph as a discursive unity. Due to my empirical interest, the concepts of otherness and violence will serve as primary lens for interpreting the pictures.

For Tagg (1982), photography is not only vested with the power to represent but also calls for the installation of a certain order. It shapes ideas of a social and political system or regime. Photographs demand the establishment of “a clear space, a healthy space, a space of unobstructed lines of sight, open to vision and supervision; a desirable space in which bodies will be changed into disease-free, orderly, docile and disciplined subjects; a space, in Foucault's sense, of a new strategy of power-knowledge” (Tagg 1982, 64).

We will see that Soviet and Russian coverage of the conflicts in Afghanistan and Chechnya follows exactly this pattern. It carries an authoritative message, vested with the power of the Soviet and Russian state and of its dominant political discourse, including distinctive perceptions of Otherness and of violence. This paper will argue that the depictions in *Krasnaia zvezda* are full of allusions to Afghanistan and Chechnya as violent and disorderly places as well as to the Other and its body; to a body that can be transformed to be disease-free and docile (Afghanistan), implying structural, “ethnocidal” violence; or to a body that is neither orderly nor disciplined and must be forced into submission adopting a physical, “genocidal” violence (Chechnya).

Finally, visibility and violence are intimately linked to each other. While critically engaging with Galtung's notion of structural violence (Galtung 1969), questioning it as too

broad and vague, Yves Winter also criticizes that “positivist definitions of violence restrict violence to the intentional, direct, immediate, and visible infliction of physical harm” (Winter 2012, 195-196). Such definitions of violence (Popitz 1992, Trotha 1997, Sofsky 1996, 2003, Tilly 2001, Collins 2011) or excessive violence (Baberowski 2012), as useful as they are, risk refusing to recognize invisible, but no less physical, forms of injury as violent (Winter 2012, 196).

Physical violence, or the consequences of it, are key topics of war photography that can trigger a wide set of reactions (Sontag 2003). They reinforce positivist conceptions of violence, supporting the demand to identify a clear “perpetrator who can be held responsible and to whom blame can be apportioned” (Winter 2012, 198). Structural violence, in the understanding I would like to advance, can also be physical, harming bodies and inflicting injuries, however, also encompassing the forced change of culture. Also, structural violence can have multiple, perpetrators, who are hard to identify, a point criticized by Trotha (1997, 19).

Hence, the seemingly harmonious and peaceful pictures that we will see in *Krasnaia zvezda*’s coverage of Afghanistan do contain power, hierarchy, threat and a violence that, however, escapes the “fetishization of the visible” (Winter). It requires a hermeneutic operation in order to be read as a violence that remains absent from the field of (visual) intelligibility.<sup>11</sup> The violent act, that Trotha (1997, 20) wants to study to understand violence, is present and is physical, but it is in need to be unraveled.

Thus, pictures *from* war that are explicitly peaceful, pictures of occupation that are harmonious, pictures of colonization that are free of struggle and resistance, are both non-violent and violent at the same time. They do not show physical harm, however, they point to an ongoing violent transformation of culture and society that certainly implies also the bodily, deadly injury, which Trotha (1997, 14) considers to be necessary for the definition of violence. This structural violence is invisible and implied. It is subtler than physical violence and can still be very bodily in its effects, changing, for example, dress codes or gender relations. Furthermore, “if silenced, especially if silenced, the violence spreads to the next generations” (Julia Kristeva quoted in Winter 2012, 195) – the silent, invisible violence is devised to shape the generations to come.

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<sup>11</sup> “The social scientific debate over what counts as violence is not as innocuous as one may imagine but reflects and contributes to these norms of visibility and recognizability” (Winter 2012, 198).

## **Afghanistan: Transforming the population**

The sample pictures under scrutiny are taken from *Krasnaia zvezda* issues published between 1980 and 1986 and reflect the gap between official justifications and the combat reality of Soviet soldiers.<sup>12</sup> The prevailing depictions represent the conflict as a widely non-violent activity. The extreme physical violence that accompanied the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, the atrocities committed by all sides in the *Gewaltraum* Afghanistan (Behrends, this volume), are denied and remain completely invisible. However, what comes to the fore is the violence of a quasi-colonial power that seeks to turn the fabric of a whole population upside-down, affecting bodies and minds of the Afghan population. The Soviet occupation of Afghanistan assisted a *mission civilisatrice* that was initiated by the Afghan government and that encompassed various fields of intervention, from medicine, gender-relations, technology transfer and the advancement of modernity as conceived in Late Socialism.<sup>13</sup> The imagery does not point at territory but rather at the Afghan population as field of intervention, at securing not at conquering. Afghanistan is explicitly not depicted as *Gewaltraum* but emerges as field of various forms of intervention, however, without the one typical for war: “defeating” the Other.<sup>14</sup> Still, the imagery points to a deeper dimension of violence as described above by Clastres’ concept of “ethnocide.” It is about preserving and reproducing the Soviet Self and about transforming the Other.

## **Meeting the Other**

Encounters between Soviet soldiers and the Afghan population constitute one main topic in the visual representation of the USSR’s occupation of Afghanistan, especially after 1981. These encounters take place in a myriad of settings. Roughly speaking, they either involve meetings between Soviet soldiers with young, modern and urban Afghans, who have already

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12 The period under scrutiny covers the heyday of occupation. According to Mikhail Gorbachev, considerations to leave took shape in 1985: “To us it was already clear in 1985 that we had to leave Afghanistan. But we could not do it at once,” Arkhiv Gorbachev-Fonda, f. 2, op. 1, k. 8049 (*Tezisy k nachalu vystupleniia M.S. Gorbacheva na Sovete Oborony*, 17 October 1989). At the same time, Gorbachev declared that “the region is strategically important and we cannot remain indifferent (...) It is important to us that the peoples know, that one can rely on the USSR,” Arkhiv Gorbachev-Fonda, f. 3 op. 1, k. 4771 (*Iz besedy M.S. Gorbacheva s Bettino Craxi*, 29 May 1985).

13 For the earnest of the Soviet efforts to transform Afghanistan see Robinson and Dixon (2013). For a discussion of modernizing wars see Malinowski (2008).

14 Ruslan Aushev, chairman of a veterans’ committee, explicitly confirms these thoughts in an interview with Ekho Moskvu: “[In Afghanistan,] we did not have the task, as many say, to defeat somebody (...) The main task for us in Afghanistan was to secure. Secure the transport of goods, secure communications, help the Afghan army” (Larina 2014). Also Gareev (1996, 371) prefers to speak of a failure of Soviet politics rather than of a failure of the military.



adopted a modern lifestyle and correspond to the vision of socialist development, for example students, or with elderly, rural Afghans, farmers who are in need of Soviet support and advice.

*Meeting on the way* (*Krasnaia zvezda*, 20 November 1983) depicts an elderly Afghan farmer talking to a young Soviet soldier in the countryside. The white-bearded, turban-wearing farmer holds a shovel in his left hand. The young soldier is visibly younger and taller than his interlocutor. The soldier wears a wide Panama-like hat with brims in front and back that shield him from the sun. Both are standing face-to-face, smiling. A third, younger Afghan is placed at the picture's center in the background, between soldier and farmer. The caption informs us that this is the soldier Irali Karimov having one of his "unforgettable meetings on the road". Despite the fact that the farmer is obviously depicted as backward and different, the stress put in the text is on what Soviet and Afghan people share. While "a smile needs no translation" (*ibid.*), Karimov comes from Central Asia and his language is well understood by the locals.<sup>15</sup> Additionally, the report's author is surprised by how many Afghans, who are generally "gifted to learn foreign languages," actually know Russian, especially the children. The peasant's sons are serving in the army, and "want to become literate" (*ibid.*). Common language and special access are key messages of this photograph. This message is elaborated in detail in the text. The latter confers a sense of rapprochement between Self and Other, which are already so close in many senses. The Soviets can already communicate to the Afghans. Now it is the Afghans' turn to do the same and learn Russian. Especially the countries' children adapt, study Russian, serve in the army, become literate, i.e. they become a bit more Soviet, i.e. more modern and a bit less backward. The story and its depiction show how even in culturally and socially distant places, like the Afghan countryside, the Soviet Union claims to have a special access, "a particular ability to understand the Asians" (Tolz 2011, 49-50). Hence, the Other, is not perceived as so different, after all, a view contradicted in later interviews with Soviet Soldiers from Central Asia (Buser and Broadhead 1992, 166). Still, in this imagery, it is the Soviet soldiers who possess a "flexible positional superiority": in terms of age, neither being children nor old men, and in terms of military strength, a rifle vs. a shovel, hence confirming a tenet of Orientalism.<sup>16</sup> The violence of transformation

15 Vadim Zagladin confirms this intimate link between Central Asia and Afghanistan in the minds of the Soviet leadership: "Basically we tried to push our Afghan friends to an accelerated advancement of socialism, according to the example of our Central Asia (...)." *Arkhiv Gorbachev-Fonda*, f. 3, op. 1, k. 7192 (*Dokladnaia zapiska V.V. Zagladina*, 20 February 1989).

16 "Orientalism depends for its strategy on this flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand" (Said 2003, 7).

becomes visible in the stress put on the coming generations that will adapt to modern standards imposed by the Soviets. Interestingly, these generations are only in the background of the photograph – instead, it is traditional Afghanistan, which is visible in the picture. The Soviets claim to supervise a non-violent cultural revolution. Thus, the violent transformation that Afghanistan is undergoing remains up to the reader's imagination.

### ***Soviet physicians and Afghan civilians***

A strikingly recurring sub-genre is the medical encounter. Pictures of this asymmetrical setting are so abounding that it would seem that the Soviet Union had invaded Afghanistan not with soldiers but with medics. From a military point of view, healthcare often was a means of gathering intelligence in Afghanistan (Braithwaite 2013, 126). More importantly, however, there is a long tradition of complicity between medicine and colonialism. Medical visits and public health inspections, for example, “were key tools for the ordering of colonial space” (Keller 2006, 28; see also Michaels 2003; Agamben 2005, 147-148; Weizman 2012, 53-55). The visual representation of medical visits points straight to the “disease-free, orderly, docile and disciplined subjects,” to which Tagg (1982, 64) referred. With medicine and healthcare being domains deemed especially suitable for women, the medical encounter also was a recurring topic in the depiction of Soviet women's involvement in the conflict.<sup>17</sup> It is also a genre, which repeatedly puts Afghan children in front of the lens. The medical encounter is, finally, a meeting between modernity and backwardness, between recipients and provider of superior knowledge.<sup>18</sup> With medicine being a bodily affair, this encounter is also physical, and there was only a thin line separating healing the patient's body from harming it.

In *Krasnaia zvezda*, this encounter takes place especially in and after 1983. In *On Afghan Soil*, for example, a Soviet nurse is surrounded by seven children of different age, four girls and three boys (*Krasnaja Zvezda*, 24 September 1983). They are standing outdoors, backing a stonewall. The dark-haired nurse, with the distinguishing high hat typical for Soviet medics and a stethoscope around her neck, smilingly leans forward and downward to the children. All but one girl are unveiled, suggesting an urban setting or children of urban/middle class

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17 For Elena Losoto hospitals represented “the uttermost limit (...) of female activity [in Afghanistan], only men go further” (Losoto 1990, 23). For an overview on the role of women in the Soviet Army and especially in Afghanistan, cf. Seniavskaia (1999, 160-170).

18 Bulgakov's *Country Doctor's Notebooks* provide another excellent example for how medicine is cast as an encounter between urban modernity, embodied by the doctor coming from the city (and desperately longing for its modern amenities), and rural backwardness, ignorance and superstition, embodied by an internal other, the Russian peasant.

upbringing, an impression supported by the neat clothing of the kids but which, however, is contradicted by the caption. Again, we have a very relaxed atmosphere. The exact relationship between nurse and children, who seem all merry and healthy, as all locals in other pictures as well, remains unclear. Is this an occasional visit to a village? Are the children in some pediatric section of a hospital? Such questions as to the precise whereabouts remain undisclosed by the picture itself and are only revealed by the accompanying text. At any rate, they also do not appear to play any role in the message the picture tries to convey: “Children are always sympathetic to kindness, even if they do not understand the words uttered in a foreign language”: the nurse Ljubov’ Epifanova, the short caption suggests, masters the language of kindness that enables her to gain access to the Other. Similarly in the picture mentioned before, the photograph suggests that there is a meta-language that the Soviet speak and that allows to bridge differences. As the Soviet forces altogether, the nurse “came to the *kishlak* upon request of the inhabitants” (ibid.). What she came for, the reader can only guess: utter word of kindness to the healthy, adopt medical knowledge to the sick. However, she also represents modern gender relations and their violent impositions over “backward” traditions. The depiction of the medical encounter, irrespective of whether it actually took place or not,<sup>19</sup> reassures the Soviet reader that through this form of meeting in Afghanistan, there is “a submission to authority” (Keller 2006, 32) and to advanced knowledge, the recognition of superiority and a relationship of mutual trust. However, Frantz Fanon, a fervent advocate of violent resistance to colonialism, has argued that in the colonial context the “clinical relationship” of trust between physician and medic is blurred and that to “reject medical authority, was to reject colonialism itself” (Keller 2006, 29). Thus, the medical encounter is in multiple ways a violent one. This violence encompasses also gender relations, which are altered in and through the depiction of the medical encounter. They are also another core topic in the coverage of Afghan women, to be discussed in the following section.

### ***Unveiling Afghan women***

“Many who have worked on British colonialism in South Asia have noted the use of the woman question in colonial policies (...) was used to justify rule” (Abu-Lughod 2002, 784). This holds also for Soviet Central Asia and Afghanistan, and the most visible sign of the alleged oppression has always been the veil. Indeed, what is completely absent in the whole

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<sup>19</sup> In her memoir, Elena Losoto shows that even in Kabul it was too dangerous to move around freely; hence, medical field-trips to the countryside seem rather unlikely. Still, she argues that Soviet medical facilities also treated locals and were hence spared from enemy fire. (Losoto 1990, 5-8, 21-23).

representation of the Afghan campaign in *Krasnaia zvezda* is the depiction of veiled women. Instead, the representation of unveiled Afghan women in different sectors of society is frequent. There are repeated allusions to how unveiling is a necessary and positive thing that is associated with other achievements the Revolution has brought to Afghanistan.

*Krasnaia zvezda*'s feature on *The heart's warmth* describes and comments a meeting between Afghan and Russian women at a military unit (*Krasnaia zvezda* 5 January 1984). The double portrait photograph related to the report depicts two women, one with fair, one with dark hair, standing closely side-by-side smiling brightly into the camera. Both wear colorful, plunging blouses. They are identified in the caption as Ljudmila Paukova from Briansk, and Nafisa Sofi, an Afghan teacher at a girls' school. The narrative of the article emphasizes the interest of Afghan women in modern Soviet life in the USSR, especially in the living conditions of Soviet women. Their Soviet counterparts are eager to inform them about their daily lives back home, about the history and customs of their cities of origin. "At a first glance it's a meeting like many. But this fact is very precious. First of all, it is the change in the position of the women in (...) Afghanistan. The Democratic Women's Organisation of Afghanistan lives, works, and broadens its ranks (...) while the majority [of the women] still is illiterate and while the influences of Islam and of tenacious medieval customs are still felt, there is no return to the past". Interestingly then, first, Islam was explicitly dissociated from modernity, deemed to be incompatible with it. However, it is not yet a threat as it will be later in the coverage of Chechnya. Secondly, the majority of women, the illiterate backward part, was mentioned but remained completely invisible. While they never found their way into the imagery of *Krasnaia zvezda*, we visually meet the most advanced and modern examples of Afghan womanhood, women open to the Soviet, modern lifestyles. The picture couples the intensity of a personal encounter with the topic of modernisation. Hence, the perspective of the *Meeting on the way* mentioned above is inverted: We see the progress, we do not see the backwardness. We actually see how lifestyles have been changed. Indeed, in this picture difference disappears. The Soviet and the Afghan women are similar in style and dressing. It is precisely the eradication of difference, the loss of identity that for Clastres is violent and causes violent reactions. This blurring of differences also becomes visible in the next picture.

Also the reporting on the "first Afghan female surgeon" comes with a portrait depiction of two women that attempts to visible differences between Self and Other. The only visible

difference between the two *Friends* (*Krasnaia zvezda*, 6 March 1984) is that one is dark-haired and the other blonde. Both are directing their glance beyond of the picture's frame. Their clothing suggests that they work in the medical sector. The heroine of this story of progress is Sukhaila Seddik, standing on the right, the first female surgeon of Afghanistan. Her “weapons in the fight against the counter-revolution are a scalpel and her knowledge”. Born in Kabul, she obtained her medical degree in Moscow, a city of which she is said to have fond memories. The woman at her side, on the left, is introduced as her assistant and friend, the Russian nurse Liudmila Babikova. Hence, Soviet presence is reduced to that of an assistant, providing help if summoned to do so by her superior, handing over the required instruments, giving advice in moments of doubt, performing secondary tasks during day-to-day routines. The relation seems technical, operational, aimed at specific common tasks, which require common expertise. The women resemble each other in their professional outfits, reducing their identities to their professional role. A key theme to which this picture and the title of the report refer is that of friendship, and more specifically of *druzhba narodov* [friendship of the peoples]. Hence, the friendship between Sukhaila and Liudmila is not only personal or institutional but represents the friendship between Afghan and Soviet people.<sup>20</sup> Liudmila can be interpreted as Sukhaila’s “friend, sister, and example” (Behrends 2008). The story told here, however, partly runs against the main reading of the friendship of peoples, because it destabilizes the hierarchical separation between nations still implied in the practice of *druzhba narodov* (Sahadeo 2007, 568). A central topic that emerges from this picture is the issue of women’s rights. They occupy a key place in the Soviet campaign in Afghanistan (Meier 2001, 94-96). “Saving Muslim women,” in Lila Abu-Lughod’s terms, is both a litmus-test of progress as well as a strategy to justify occupation and forced adaptation.<sup>21</sup>

### ***Afghan outlaws: a phenomenon of the past***

One of the most stunning characteristics of the reporting on Afghanistan in *Krasnaia zvezda* is the nearly complete absence of a depiction of enemy fighters. Given the scale of conflict and the excess of violence by all parties, the lack of reporting in this regard clearly underscores the propagandistic character of the newspaper. As discussed above, the Afghan population might be backward, however, all in all, it is friendly and well-disposed to Soviet advice, even eager to acquire Soviet knowledge and follow the path to modernity. Still, there are very few occasional depictions of resistance and violence, which were highly regulated: Soviet

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20 On the problematic nature of this “friendship of the peoples” see Behrends (2005).

21 On Soviet attitudes towards Islam see for instance Edgar (2006).

authorities made it a taboo to depict physical violence and still in 1985, depiction of “sporadic cases (...) of wounded or killed soviet soldiers” was officially limited to “not more than one per month” in the Soviet press.<sup>22</sup> In a very rare, early depiction of Soviet prisoners, we have *Outlaws (bandity)* (*Krasnaia zvezda*, 16 September 1980). Six outlaws are standing in line. All of them wear long cloths and traditional headgears, and all appear to be rather elderly. A single, young soldier at the right margin of the picture guards them. While his prisoners are depicted as traditional or backward at worst, they all retain a certain expression of dignity. The soldier guarding them appears, in stark contrast, to be extremely young, insecure, clumsily holding an oversized assault-rifle. The story told is not one of complete victory and total defeat, as we will see in Chechnya. Rather it is, again, a juxtaposition of backwardness and progress. Instead of orientalizing the *Other* as in Chechnya, as will be shown below, it is Afghanistan’s *past* which is orientalized in the imagery of *Krasnaia zvezda*. The picture could also be read in the sense that while the backwardness is yet numerically superior (in 1980), progress as represented by the shy soldier already prevails. While the young soldier is the future, the elderly outlaws are a phenomenon of past.

### **Chechnya: reconquering a lost territory**

To analyze the nature of violence and Self-Other relations in Chechnya, I turned to *Krasnaia zvezda* issues from January 2000 to December 2003, at the peak of the Second Chechen War. The violence as depicted on *Krasnaia zvezda*'s pages during this period seems to be of a completely different character than the depiction of the occupation of Afghanistan: It is visible and physical. Most intriguingly, civilians are largely absent from the coverage. There was a deliberate lack of interest for the civilians in Chechens, because they are not considered to be transformable. The “structural violence” of colonization disappears and what remains is the physical one. The overwhelming number of photographs is dedicated to Russian soldiers in action, performing deeply soldierly tasks. However, I will focus on some the exceptions in *Krasnaia zvezda*'s reporting, in order to allow for a direct comparison with the visual material on Afghanistan.<sup>23</sup>

22 RGANI, f. 89, dok. 103, per. 11, l. 3 (O publikatsiakh v sredstvakh massovoi informatsii materialov otnositel'no deistvii ogranichenogo kontingenta sovetskikh voisk v Afganistane, 24 June 1985).

23 Also, the formal use of images changed drastically. While during the 1980s there was a close connection between pictures, captions and report, with the latter often providing an extended interpretation of the picture, now, in the 2000s, text and picture loosely relate to each other. The same pictures were used several times to provide illustration for any random report about Chechnya. Hence, certain topics per se represent Chechnya.

### *Civilians and children*

Civilians rarely appear in the newspaper's reports on Chechnya. While it might well be that in the early phases of the war there was simply no possibility to take pictures of civilian life as it virtually came to a halt, this explanation does not hold for later issues.

In *Frontline Outpost of Law*, a Russian soldier is checking the papers of a Chechen woman (*Krasnaia zvezda*, 16 March 2001). She holds a young child in her arms, who cries while looking at the tall soldier in his neat uniform. The woman's facial expression is desperate. In the background, a multitude of women and young men can be seen. From the left a huge hand is about to reach to the papers in the soldier's hand, picking out or pointing to a specific document. In the right corner of the picture another hand holds an ID, possibly of a local waiting in line to present her papers. The picture confers a sense of chaos and confusion, with the soldier being the sole anchor of stability in this turmoil. Most likely this disorder is result of violence and military action that had taken place earlier, before the picture has been shot, or the picture shows a notorious "filtration point." The accompanying text gives no direct explanation about the details of this photograph. However, the report is remarkable because it does not stress past violence, but rather ongoing violence. It conceives Chechnya as unruly *Gewaltstraum*: "Chechnya is not only an ache [*bol'*], but also a continuous concern [*zabota*]," the key task is to restore a "peaceful life, to feed the local population, to make them safe from on-going rowdyism."<sup>24</sup> Hence, it requires the return of the Russian state. Not surprisingly, then, the focus of the report shifts away from victims (the local population) and perpetrators (the "rowdies") to the enforcers of a new stability, to agents of the state, namely to the state prosecutors. Coming from different parts of the Russian Federation to Chechnya, their task is to guarantee legality, law and order [*zakonnost' i pravoporiadok*] in a violent environment. The report thus echoes a key theme of official Russian discourse in that period,<sup>25</sup> and the scene of the photograph will seem familiar to many readers.<sup>26</sup> Difficulties arise, the report explains, because the attorneys have to deal with people "who only yesterday were fighting and who are ready to reach for the arms at any moment, for any reason. For many of them, law has an abstract meaning" (*Krasnaia zvezda*, 16 March 2001). Thus, what is interesting about this description of the Other is that, on the one hand, there are peaceful locals who

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24 For the roots of the Russian usage of the term *khuliganstvo*, see Neuberger (1993).

25 The return of order and legality was a key theme of Vladimir Putin's presidential campaign and remained a pillar of his legitimacy. Famously, he promised a "dictatorship of law" (Putin 2008, 49).

26 Police checking the papers of people from the Caucasus or Central Asia is a common sight in Russian cities.

deserve care and protection, those shown in the photograph. On the other hand, they have been previously under arms and have no proper understanding of legality; being backward and inclined towards violence, they make it hard for the modern Russian state to install legality. This position echoes what Clastres had denounced as the naturalist approach to violence. Compared to Afghanistan, where the overall majority of the population was friendly and advancing to modernity, despite some small pockets of counter-revolution and crime, now the population is described as potentially dangerous, with the line between militants and civilians being blurred.<sup>27</sup> Chechens have an “abstract meaning of the rule of law,” which is a feature of modernity, and are therefore prone to violence. Still, this backward community might still possess human features: concerning Afghanistan, *Krasnaia zvezda*, put much emphasis on children, regarding Chechnya the theme returns, although with a surprising twist.

Complementing an interview to the commander of the North Caucasus Military District, Vladimir Boldyrev, in the wake of the 2003 referendum, *Gray and wise Caucasus* features a picture which reminds those relating to the Afghanistan war (*Krasnaia zvezda*, 21 March 2003): In front of an armored vehicle, a Russian soldier is kneeling down to hand over small gifts to a young Chechen girl, easily identifiable by her “typical” headscarf. They are joined by a boy of even younger age. This topic, at first glance, strongly recalls pictures from Afghanistan. Yet, in contrast to Afghan representations, it has at least two sub-texts: first, from top of an armored vehicle, another soldier watches over this encounter. Also, in contrast to the Soviet soldiers meeting Afghans, this soldier is in full body armor and shoulders a rifle. Thus, the threat of armed conflict and physical violence is clearly visible in this picture, while it is widely erased in depictions from Afghanistan. Second, there is no hint at changing local culture. Difference is preserved and clearly visible: there seems to be no intention to further any change in this regard. The accompanying report is not directly related to the picture. It is only an embedded caption (in the printed version of *Krasnaia zvezda* but omitted in the online version) that gives a title to the picture, “With an open heart,” reminding the “Heart’s warmth” in Afghanistan. Boldyrev, of course, does not mention the soldiers’ open hearts. Rather, when asked about first impressions from his travels to the garrisons, he boasts about the “obvious power of the North Caucasus Military District” [*ochevidnaia moshch’ SKVO*] and that it is in southern regions of the Federation that the strongest part of the country’s army

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27 Gareev (1996, 375) briefly alludes to the situation in Chechnya and stresses that its “peaceful inhabitants” can be equipped with machine-guns or grenade launchers.



is concentrated. There is, nevertheless, one hint at the picture's topic, as he mentions that "the most important thing in the District is that the people, soldiers, officers, the civilian personnel fulfill even the most difficult tasks, displaying combat experience, great professionalism and moral readiness". With this hint, Boldyrev gets as close as he can to the "open heart" mentioned in the picture's caption. Still, he seems to live in a separate, distant world in which readiness to exert military force needed to subdue the enemy is the key feature. Thus, there is a disconnect between the photograph that suggest the kindness of past times and the report that stresses military might, thus pointing a disconnect between visible and invisible violence.

In contrast to the report above, *Khattab-Iugend* deals with threatening Chechen civilians (*Krasnaia zvezda*, 11 October 2000). The photograph related to the article depicts three young boys with short hair, standing on a road, each holding an oversized Kalashnikov rifle. We see them waist-up. Two of them smile brightly, looking at one point to the right of the spectator. Only the third boy looks straight but more seriously into the lens of the camera. The picture strongly contrasts with the picture mentioned above and again with the celebration of youth and of children in Afghanistan. While in Afghanistan, children were deemed to be the bright future of a prospering and socialist country, children now turn into a threat. The rifles in the hands of the children emphasize the violence that could erupt at any moment. The report stresses the ideological indoctrination of children and how they are manipulated to hate and fight others. The theme of manipulation will resurface with regard to women. Illiteracy, which was discussed regularly concerning Afghanistan, briefly resurfaces also in this report ("They cannot read, but hold a rifle"). However, while in Afghanistan it was stressed how Soviet assistance helped to eradicate it, in Chechnya, illiteracy seems to be an unchangeable fact of Chechen life. Radicalized, uneducated children appear as potential danger to the Russian troops and thus simply as a military problem to be solved. If there ever was a Soviet civilizing mission in Chechnya, it must have failed. Using the German term *Jugend* ("youth") alludes to *Hitler-Youth* and hence at the deeply running opposition which separates the Russian soldiers from their enemies. Reconciliation or negotiation with such a radicalism, which can only be compared to "fascism," is impossible and calls for violent means as the only option to counter it. "Fascism" was also deployed to denote the enemies in the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine, again making reconciliation hardly a viable option. As children and the civilian population in general are represented as mostly hostile in Chechnya, so the perceived role of military medics has changed as compared to Afghanistan.

### ***Russian physicians and Russian soldiers***

Army physicians in Chechnya are repeatedly featured in *Krasnaia zvezda*. While in Afghanistan, they appeared to be integral part of the Soviet *mission civilisatrice*, of the machine of societal transformation, now, in Chechnya, they are released from this task altogether. They are depicted as completely devoted to the care of Russian soldiers. In Chechnya, we do not have a colonial medicine at work, but rather medical care devoted to the Russian military only. Accordingly, we now see them inside hospitals, and not making field trips to Chechen villages.

*Here they return to the ranks* describes the work of a Russian military hospital, the fate of various soldiers who have been wounded in Chechnya, and how they are patched together by the medics (*Krasnaia zvezda*, 28 February 2001). The report stresses the high degree of professionalism of the medical staff, which knows their patients by heart. The three young surgeons in the picture associated with the report are sitting side-by-side at their workplace and are introduced by name. The two young men and the woman at the center confer a sense of professional calm amid a putative busy schedule. They look confidently and relaxed into the camera. However, the mask in surgeon's hand on the right suggests that they have been performing medical tasks just seconds before the picture has been taken or are about to do so in the next moment. The room the physicians are sitting in appears clean and neat. Its austerity, however, contrasts with the modernity of the hospital described in the text. The violence and the result of the violence that provided these physicians with work remains invisible in this picture. Interestingly, it is the effects of the resistance's violence that are obscured. Finally, the female surgeon depicted here is one of the very few examples of Russian women working in the context of the Chechen conflict. However, also Chechen women are rarely depicted.

### ***The absence of women***

Modern Afghan women have been a key topic in *Krasnaia zvezda*'s reporting on Afghanistan. The narrative is completely different in the Chechen case. Actually, it is the other way round: what we see are only the "backward" women in a double guise: either as dangerous ("black widows") or merry and traditional.

Discussing the normalisation of the situation in Chechnya after the fully-fledged war, women reappear here in *Electing a leader, they set a course* in a traditional guise (*Krasnaia zvezda*, October 11, 2003): three young Chechen girls wearing traditional clothes and scarves apparently perform a traditional dance against the backdrop of green plants. While the girl at the center places her arms up, the other's arms point downwards. Smiling young women suggest a restoration of normality. However, strikingly, modern or secular, femininity has no place in the depictions of Chechnya in the *Krasnaia zvezda*, anticipating the Islamization that took place after the war (Szczepanikova, this volume). The newspaper visually returns to a one-sided picture of women as in the Afghan case but totally focuses on tradition.

This approach is in line with reports that cover terrorism (for example *Krasnaia zvezda*, 5 March 2003 and *Krasnaia zvezda*, 28 August 2003), and which directly link it to Chechen women. In these reports, the newspaper presents a negative discussion of Chechen femininity, which is closely tied to "Islam." *Has terror a female face?* (*Krasnaia zvezda*, 5 March 2003) discusses why "potential mothers" turn into terrorists. The article highlights how women from all over the Caucasus are psychologically manipulated by "terrorists" until they see no other option to escape the moral and physical humiliation they suffer. What strikes the reader is, firstly, that in this representation, the women concerned lack any agency. Passively they are drawn to terrorism. The agency re-emerges only in the terrorist undertaking. That the women concerned might act consciously is neglected. Secondly, female terrorism is depoliticized. It is just result of a manipulation. The underlying political struggle is erased. While the picture strongly hints at a violent, de-humanizing and de-feminizing Islam, which is closely linked to extremism and terrorism,<sup>28</sup> the report stresses how such violence runs against the Faith's teachings, by which the newspaper claims to have the correct understanding of Islam. Given the widespread violence against women during the Chechen conflict, it is appalling to see how victims are turned into perpetrators in *Krasnaia zvezda*'s reporting. By adopting this perspective, the vicious circle of violence is continued. Chechnya is cast as a violent space and this violence justifies violent state intervention, paradoxically, in order to reduce violence, however just spurring violent resistance.

### ***The defeated Other***

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28 The second Russo-Chechen conflict was framed into the context of the international "War on terror," and terrorism and extremism were used interchangeably (Bacon, Renz, and Cooper 2006, 115-123). Terrorism was chiefly seen as a military issue alone. A rare departure from this stance came in 2009, when Dmitry Medvedev declared the problems in the North Caucasus to be socioeconomic in nature (Medvedev 2009).

As in the reports from the 1980s, depictions of the enemy in arms are scarce. While many photographs confer a sense of danger and alarm, there are few pictures of actual “terrorists” or “insurgents.”

*ABC with a wolf's grin* (*Krasnaia zvezda*, 6 June 2001) reports about a successful operation against “criminals.” In contrast to the prisoners depicted in Afghanistan, however, what we find here is a completely different visual narrative. While the Afghan prisoners had been depicted standing in front of the camera, not even being handcuffed, and preserving a certain dignity, in this depiction two Chechen “outlaws” seem utterly defeated. They squat deeply in front of their captors on an open field, in front of a military jeep with open front and rear doors. Their legs are torn into an awkward angle. The men stripped to the waist, blindfolded, barefooted and handcuffed. The impression of total defeat is reinforced by the overwhelming physical appearance of the two fully-armed Russian soldiers guarding them: one of them appears extremely tall and heavy, standing directly in front of and above one of his captives. The latter seems to be at his total mercy. In contrast to the heavy physical appearance of the soldiers, the prisoners seem small and skinny, bent forward into a submissive posture. Hence, this is the depiction of a physical victory of the strong against the weak, of a successfully applied violence. It is also the visual reversal of the narrative of the embarrassing first Chechen war, in which experienced Chechen militiamen defeated weak Russian conscripts. It also reverses the story of humiliating retreat from Afghanistan.

## **Conclusions**

Thirty years elapsed between the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and the Second Russo-Chechen war, and historical circumstances changed dramatically. The pictures analyzed in this paper reflect very well the stark differences in the self-perception of the USSR and of post-Soviet Russia. Most importantly, they underscore that post-Soviet Russia carries no historical or developmental project for its periphery (Prozorov 201, 272). While the Soviet Union professed a belief in social transformation and displayed a modernizing, self-confidence in its “specific,” socialist, “civilizing mission,” post-Soviet Russia’s dominating political discourse after 1999 put much more emphasis on sovereignty, law and order, on preserving its territory and its spheres of influence. However, the photographs in *Krasnaia zvezda* reveal more.

The paper analyzed photographs of the two conflicts in *Krasnaia zvezda* under two aspects. Firstly, it identified forms of violence in the respective depictions of the conflicts. Secondly, it discussed the Self-Other construction involved in these visual representations. All in all, the visual and non-visual narratives on Chechnya and Afghanistan share one commonality: Chechnya and Afghanistan are depicted as places lacking order. They either need the installment of a new social and cultural order (Afghanistan), or the *re*-installment of a previously lost political order (Chechnya). Otherwise, *Krasnaia zvezda* presents two different narratives of the conflicts.

Regarding the forms of violence involved in the conflicts, the war in Chechnya has been depicted as space of violence, which requires the application of military force to defeat and subdue the other in order to restore state sovereignty. While *Krasnaia zvezda* conveyed the message that the USSR tried to secure Afghanistan, the newspaper is unambiguous that Russia tried to reconquer Chechnya. Therefore, violence became much more visible in the depictions of Chechnya, and less so regarding Afghanistan. This suggests that the power exercised over Chechnya, as depicted in *Krasnaia zvezda*, rested much more on the right of the sword and much less on patience, wisdom, and diligence,<sup>29</sup> as allegedly the power in Afghanistan. Since the Other is orientalized in Chechnya, it is possible to wage war against it. Thus, the representation of the conflict in Chechnya contains more hints at “genocidal” violence than at “ethnocide,” in Pierre Clastres’ terms, since a transformation of the way of life of the Chechen population was just of no interest to the Russian regime. This lack of interest in the population is directly linked to the indiscriminate violence that was actually applied in Chechnya. What further buttresses this claim is the consistent depiction of the Chechen population as stuck in backwardness. As long as it poses no threat it can stay as it is. The Chechen resistance is extensively discussed. The Chechen violence is cast as a resistance against the Russian state’s authority and portrayed as a feature of Chechen culture, echoing the naturalist approach mentioned by Clastres (2010).

Concerning Afghanistan, in contrast, *Krasnaia zvezda* tells the story of a Soviet occupation that had only a minor military component, opening a big gap between ubiquitous physical violence on the ground and its erasure from official representation. First and foremost, the Soviet intervention appears to have been about changing the way of life of a population, about taking it out of so-called medieval customs and elevating it to modern,

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29 “Sovereign power’s effect on life is exercised only when the sovereign can kill. (...) It is essentially the right of the sword” (Foucault 2003, 137, 240). See also Foucault (1978, 136).

Soviet standards. For Clastres, this would have been an attempt at “ethnocide.” This endeavor was primarily a cultural one and *Krasnaia zvezda* focuses fully on this violence against culture, with physical violence remaining invisible but implied. Since it is *Afghan past* that is orientalized, war is waged more on traditional lifestyles than on the Other itself. Afghans themselves are depicted as being eager to take over the form of modernity proposed by the Soviet Union. Accordingly, what we see are episodes of peaceful interaction between Afghans and Soviets in a myriad of different settings. Afghan society becomes the primary target of intervention and the ordinary Soviet private a major agent of change. The soldiers are depicted in activities that are definitely not that of warriors as in Chechnya but more of social workers, physicians or agricultural experts, whose task it is to secure the Afghan population, possibly improving their living conditions and their environment, and ultimately: the overall betterment of the population itself, i.e. the advancement of socialism. Behind these pictures of harmony and progress, looms a specter of violence exercised not only on the Afghan culture but also on Afghan’s bodies. An indirect hint at this corporeal dimension is given by the depiction of the medical encounter. The imagery related to the medical encounter conveys a sense of the Soviet authorities’ alleged tutelary relationship between the Self and the Other as well as their superiority in terms of power, skills and knowledge. Resistance is almost absent from *Krasnaia zvezda*’s reporting. The hint at *banditism* mentioned above, points in the direction of an economist approach to violence, as described by Clastres. Hence, eradicating poverty and backwardness and advancing socialist modernity, would suffice to quell the remnants of Afghan resistance.

Regarding the depiction of the Other clear differences have emerged. However, there is one striking commonality: it is one-sided in both cases. This applies especially with regard to the female identities presented in *Krasnaia zvezda*, which are either only modern in the Afghan case, or only traditional in the Chechen case. In Afghanistan, on the one hand, the newspaper put great emphasis on showing how *modern* femininity is established through Soviet intervention. Especially in its visual representation, *Krasnaia zvezda* leaves little room for reflecting the complexity of gender relations in Afghanistan. Either women are completely modern, or, as the reports describe verbally but seldom visually, Afghan women remain stuck in backwardness.<sup>30</sup>

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30 *Krasnaia zvezda* omits for example that in the Afghan countryside, male/female segregation was much looser than in the cities Hirschkind and Mahmood (2002, 339).

In the case of Chechnya, on the other hand, women predominantly appear as potential threats and passive victims, which can be easily manipulated. They are always associated with a *traditional* lifestyle. There seems to be nothing left of Soviet Chechnya. Rather, Chechnya appears as immune to change, reflecting a typical orientalist conception of an immutable East (Said 2003, 86). Hence, in Chechnya we have a conflict in which two completely different *cultures* oppose each other. In Afghanistan, religion appears as symbol of backward traditions. In the coverage of Chechnya, Islam appears as a threat and as a symbol of a violent culture. Violence generally seems to be an essential, almost genetic trait of Chechen society. Thus, violence seems to be the only means apt to act in the framework of such a *Gewaltraum*. As a consequence, there are very few photographs of friendly encounters with the Other, who either remains a largely threatening presence, or a defeated one. In Afghanistan, however, informal, casual, spontaneous meetings were a key theme, as if we had encounters at a deeply popular plane, far-away from official, organized or imposed gatherings.

I would like to highlight two implications of these meetings as they are depicted in *Krasnaia zvezda*. Firstly, the encounters between these emissaries involve an asymmetrical meeting of knowledge, between a superior and an inferior one. The Soviet soldiers appear as the bearer of modern civilization. They are depicted as passing it on to the Afghans who are shown as being eager eager to adapt.<sup>31</sup> Secondly, this transfer of knowledge presupposes that Soviets have a privileged access to the population of Afghanistan, especially due to the alleged cultural proximity of Central Asian soldiers. Actually these soldiers experienced a double pressure: on the one hand, they had trouble to adapting to an Afghan society that was so distant from their Soviet lives (Buser and Broadhead 1992), on the other hand, they were distrusted by their fellow Russian soldiers (Feifer 2009, 105). While Central Asians might have been discriminated in Russian cities (Sahadeo 2007, 567), on the pages of *Krasnaia zvezda* they were shining examples of the New Soviet Person, for how socialist modernity and attachment to cultural traditions can go along, and for the Soviet Union's empathy for the peoples of the East.

In Chechnya, depicting such encounters was impossible, because of the assumption of the Other's hostility; even children were depicted as dangerous. The Other appears dehumanized, blindfolded and handcuffed, veiled and faceless. The Self, in contrast, is strong and dominating. As opposed to the imagery of Afghanistan, emphasis is put on the

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31 In Orientalism "the Other wants what the Self has to give her" (Chowdhury 2012, 20). While this "superiority" might be a typical theme of "druzhba narodov," it remains doubtful whether it could be equally applied to European "friends."

construction of masculinity: Chechnya was, as Galina Zvereva (2006) succinctly put it, a male business, a *rabota dlia mushchin*. Afghanistan, among other thanks to the emphasis on the medical encounter, seems to be a female endeavor as well, a *rabota dlia zhenshchin*.

Hence, in Pierre Clastres' terms, the overall Soviet approach in Afghanistan that *Krasnaia zvezda* describes is that of "ethnocidal" violence against the backdrop of poverty-driven resistance: the USSR attempted to erase an traditional culture and replace it by a new, modern and socialist one. This was possible since the Other was assumed to be able and even eager to change and "improve." In Chechnya, in contrast, *Krasnaia zvezda*'s visual representation suggests physical, "genocidal" violence against the backdrop of a inherently violent Chechen culture: since the Other is not reformable, neither willing nor able, since it is utterly different and dangerous, the only option seems to violently subdue it.

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